

NEWS

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Contractor Selected for White Mountain Stewardship Project on Arizona's Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests

Albuquerque, N.M. (August 10, 2004)—The USDA Forest Service has awarded Future Forests Limited Liability Corporation, a local company based in the White Mountains, the White Mountain stewardship contract on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in Arizona.

The contract is the first, large, 10-year stewardship contract in the nation and is significant due to its emphasis on large-scale forest restoration activities that result in healthier forests, enhanced rural development, and the utilization of previously unmarketable small diameter trees. The contract is for an estimated treatment of approximately 5,000 to 25,000 acres per year over the 10-year term of the contract. It facilitates the development of a woods products industry better suited to market the excessive number of small-diameter and some larger trees on the national forests. Such trees have been removed in the past by a series of smaller thinning contracts and the resultant slash or woody debris was usually treated by burning. The new contract will result in the smaller trees being used for various uses such as in a power-generation, lumber and manufacturing of wood pellets. This would reduce the need to burn such material in the forest, and result in a cost reduction to the taxpayer. The Forest Service described the desired conditions in the Request for Proposals and carefully evaluated each proposal to determine the one that best meets the desired condition.

"I'm pleased with the Southwest Region and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests," said Dale Bosworth, Chief of the USDA Forest Service. "This contract will make a positive difference to people and the land."

"The forests of the Southwest are in dire need of thinning, and stewardship contracts will provide a much needed mechanism by which large tracts of land can be treated resulting in increased protection of communities and improved health of our precious forests," said Harv Forsgren, Regional Forester of the Southwestern Region. "A stewardship contract allows for the costs of removal of small trees, residue and slash to be exchanged for the value of the excess trees that are removed. The goal is to find uses for all the wood fiber and by doing so, reduce the amount of wood burned in the forest, reduce treatment costs and provide jobs in the local communities."

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The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, which comprises a significant portion of the largest contiguous ponderosa pine forest in North America, faces large-scale threats to communities from large wildland fires. The suppression of fire over the last hundred years contributed to the development of very dense forests. These forests that once were characterized by 20 to 60 trees per acre now average over 400 trees per acre, which makes the forest vulnerable to intense wildfire and insect damage.

“Most of the lands treated under this contract are in the wildland-urban interface and we hope to reduce the number of trees closer to what grew there historically when fire managed the forests,” said Elaine Zieroth, Apache-Sitgreaves NFs forest supervisor. “We have to reduce the number of trees across the forests on a large scale so that the threat of catastrophic fire will be minimized, and the remaining trees can better resist drought and insects.”

“Stewardship contracting provides the flexibility to leverage with the best price per acre available,” added Forsgren. “We’re extremely pleased to be able to utilize this initiative, because it benefits the forest, the contractor, the establishment of new woods products industries and the community.”

Nationally, the USDA Forest Service and Interior Department agencies are using the tools of the President’s Healthy Forests Initiative and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to treat and restore record numbers of acres. This year, the agencies plan to treat more than 3.7 million acres – more than a million acres more than were treated last year and three times the total acres treated in 2000.